

ROSKILL / ALBERT REFUGEE YOUTH WELLBEING PROJECT

**Afghani, Somali and Ethiopian Communities in
conjunction with Relationship Services and
Ministry of Social Development *Settling In***

September 2009

Introduction

The Roskill / Albert Refugee Youth Wellbeing Project was initiated by three local communities – Afghani, Somali and Ethiopian. The project goal was to support and assist refugee young people in the Mt Roskill and Mt Albert areas.

Background

Refugee young people, their families and the wider community started considering refugee youth needs and possible solutions. The three communities were concerned with low education, employment and social achievements by many of their young people. Out of a series of youth forum meetings, issues for young people and strategies to create change were identified. Motivational speakers helped the young people create their vision for their future.

Settling In- Family & Community Services, MSD; Work and Income New Zealand; The Wesley Community Centre; local High Schools and Auckland Regional Public Health supported the communities in the first youth forums.

One of the key strategies for change was to pilot community youth workers to work with young people from the refugee communities. The pilot was about empowering the Afghani, Somali and Ethiopian communities and finding youth workers from within the respective communities to mentor and support the young people.

Issues faced by Refugee Young People

Many refugee young people are failing at school, or are unemployed and not participating constructively in society.

The issues they struggle with include:

- Dealing with the trauma they and their families have experienced before coming to New Zealand;
- Language and literacy issues;
- Educational achievement prior to coming to New Zealand may be low and time spent in refugee camps has interrupted their education;
- Family issues of poverty, employment, status and adjusting to New Zealand ;
- Inter-generational issues with parental concern about westernisation of their children/teenagers, and concern about loss of culture and religion;
- Fitting in to New Zealand life;
- Developing goals, expectations and options for a positive future.

Community Leaders and parents were concerned with poor outcomes such as criminal and violent behavior, youth street gangs, substance abuse, failing at school, high unemployment and family dysfunction.

There were two contributing factors for the need for youth projects in this area:

1. The diversity of the population in Roskill/Albert ward, with a significant number of refugee families residing in the area as evidenced by issues reported in the local papers, and;
2. The opportunity to support the resilience of the young people from these communities.

The youth forums demonstrated a number of strengths, particularly within the Somali, Ethiopian and Afghani communities such as:

- A strong sense of cultural identity and an educated, established and knowledgeable youth population;
- Strong and firm leadership from young people who were able to articulate their concerns, needs and aspirations;
- A wealth of indigenous and alternative knowledge and un-tapped creativity, talent and artistic skill;
- Will, courage and determination to do better;
- Unconditional support from well educated experienced and well travelled older people, despite their work experience and qualifications not being recognised in New Zealand.

The myriad strengths of these refugee communities acts as a support system for young people, their future leaders. It was acknowledged in the series of meetings and workshops, that refugee young people and their communities brought with them knowledge, and innovation, that, with the right supports, will act in their interest from a wellbeing perspective.

Project Update

Three part-time community development youth workers were employed to work with the young people from their respective communities. The project timeframe was two years and the purpose was to build community capacity, assess the need for a refugee youth worker project, and identify responses to that need.

The youth workers were: Mustaf Omar, from the Somali Community; Zenebe Tsega from the Ethiopian community and Mohammed Shakir Nessar from the Afghani community.

The Youth Workers were based at the Wesley Community Centre and worked within and across their communities at different levels to effect positive change. They worked with individual young people with a full range of specific issues such as family breakdown issues, immigration issues, Community Probation sentencing, school problems, illness and substance abuse.

They helped motivate young people to achieve well and organised training seminars and learning opportunities. They recognised that they needed to engage young people through sport and leisure activities so these were also organised.

They advocated for young people at school, university and in workplaces.

Families were supported by the youth workers and resolution to problems worked through.

The Community Leaders gave significant support to the Youth Workers and this was key to achieving good outcomes.

Outcome Highlights

A soccer tournament and celebration dinner was held to bring young people from the three communities together and promote positive interaction
Fifteen (young?) people found employment, 5 young people were supported into tertiary study and 4 young people into vocational training
A Work and Income Case Manager and a Career Services representative visited the Wesley Community Centre weekly to see young people and their parents from the community
The three youth workers were appointed as a key resource for the communities
Young people dropping out of school were supported into vocational training, returned to school or supported into employment
An Ethiopian youth network was established that operates throughout NZ
Young people had direct access to employment searches and ongoing support to ensure they were work ready
An Afghani youth music event created an opportunity for an Afghani music band to perform
University Students provided mentoring to high school students in their community
Refugee parents were encouraged to support their young people to participate in existing community school holiday programmes
Training events were organised to motivate, inform and educate young people

Summary

As a result of the project it has been identified there is still significant need for youth worker activity for refugee young people in the Roskill/Albert area. There have been many benefits, highlighted in this report, however, even with the positive intervention over the two years, significant issues are still present and in some cases appear to have increased, due in part to the impact of the global recession.

The two groups most significantly affected by the recession are refugee and migrant workers, and young people. Refugee young people have had a particularly difficult time seeking, and once successful, maintaining employment.

Recommendations

To provide the right support to our refugee young people, this report suggests the following recommendations moving forward:

- **Focus** on assisting refugee young people to acquire work-ready skills;
- **Provide** youth workers with specific skills in case management, community development and capacity building who are embedded in the community;
- **Review** the assistance available to assist refugee young people with employment;
- **Prioritise** and plan for positive outcomes for refugee young people using a range of youth development initiatives
- **Build** on the original Roskill Refugee Youth Project - designed and shaped by local refugee young people.

The support of Auckland City Council, Settling In- Family & Community Services, MSD, Ministry of Youth Development, Refugee As Survivors, Auckland Regional Public Health, Work and Income, Career Services, Wesley Community Centre and other organisations is gratefully acknowledged.